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ABSTRACT

The Cornell School of Hotel Administration in collaboration with the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics offers a course in French for a small group of students who have had the equivalent of at least two semesters of college French. The course emphasizes oral/aural French with very little class time spent on grammar study. Grammar reviews and exercises are assigned and quizzes are given, but the students' greatest motivation for learning grammar comes with the realization of the usefulness of grammatical speech in the hotel profession. The basic text is a French textbook, patterned after French hotel-school manuals, which covers the various hotel services and courtesies. Supplementary hotel realia, slides collected in France, and videotaped advertisements are used by students to prepare conversations, and two professional publications are used for current information and vocabulary development. Students practice their skills in a campus hotel. Guest speakers and field trips to a French hotel in the United States are part of the curriculum, and a summer internship exchange program is being established. Instruction in cultural differences and French concepts of courtesy is included in the course. Part of the final exam is an oral proficiency interview by a teacher other than the course teacher. A more advanced course of the same type and a general business language course at a lower level are proposed, and a similar Spanish course is currently being developed. (MSE)

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FRENCH FOR "HOTELLIES"

A RECENTLY INSTITUTED COURSE AT THE CORNELL SCHOOL OF HOTEL ADMINISTRATION

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I.

It is difficult for us who teach foreign languages to imagine that, in today's world, institutions that prepare young people for managerial positions -- and in particular for managerial positions in the Hotel Industry -- may not have a foreign language requirement. This, in fact, has been the case at the internationally known Cornell School of Hotel Administration. Thanks, however, to the initiative of Dean John Clark, the School may now move in the direction of a requirement; since Fall of 1983, it has been offering a course entitled "HA 166: Continuing French, Le Français de l'Hôtellerie et du Tourisme," affectionately known as "French for Hotellies." A colleague and I have developed this course, a modest beginning, and we are pleased with its early results. It is the first course of its kind at Cornell, except for an elementary program in business Japanese developed by Eleanor Jorden with a grant from a Japanese foundation, which is a parallel program to her now classic course in Japanese for beginners.[1]

This does not mean that from now on we will see such courses proliferate at Cornell. Expanding this course or creating similar courses in other languages might yet encounter some resistance. I can illustrate this by an anecdote: I was crossing campus last Fall on my way to the Hotel class when I ran into a professor of English, a colleague of my husband. He asked me what I was teaching that semester, and when I told him the title of my course, he laughed heartily and said: "Oh! Yes, you teach them how to read

[1]Jorden, Eleanor Harz, Beginning Japanese. Yale: Yale University Press, 1963.

menus!" It so happened that on that very day I was taking to class, as part of my lesson on French eating habits, excerpts from Rabelais, Boileau, Flaubert and Proust, as a few examples of the importance of food in French literature. I opened my briefcase and showed him what it contained. I believe that I did my share, that day, towards gaining acceptance in academia for applied foreign languages.

II.

This paper is principally a description of the hotel course with some observations from the point of view of one who has otherwise taught more traditional language courses in elementary and intermediate French.

A. When the Hotel School established the course under the aegis of the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics, my colleague, Nancy Gaenslen, and I had carte blanche as to what exactly we were going to teach and how we were going to teach it, but there were some givens: The course, first and foremost a language course, would be offered for students who already had the equivalent of 2 semesters of college French or a CPT score of 450; the class would be limited to 12, like any Cornell language class, and would meet 5 times a week; the emphasis would be on aural-oral French and very little class time would be spent on the formal teaching of grammar, a priority which betrays a rather idealistic view of language-learning in the classroom context.

Today it is difficult, even in the Ivy League, to convince students of the value of humanistic studies and of foreign languages in particular. Mastering a foreign language, except for a blessed few, has never been an easy

task and the task is even harder when so many students have little knowledge of the structure of their own language and find any kind of rote learning distasteful. However, we all know what part motivation can play in learning, even -- as you'll see -- in learning grammar. Once again, we were not going to teach grammar but simply assign chapters and exercises in a review book (Coffman, French Grammar (Schaum's Outlines) McGraw-Hill), with the understanding that students could raise questions and ask for help at any time. My Hotel students feel strongly that 166 is their course and they view studying grammar on their own with benevolence. To make sure that they study and assimilate the lesson, I do give them short weekly quizzes. It always amuses and pleases me to see that they view those quizzes as a personal challenge and get angry at themselves if they miss an answer or two. Quite often, in fact, I find them begging for more grammar, something that usually language teachers can only phantasize about. As a case in point: I have had many students fresh out of high school who never seriously studied the subjunctive because they have the idea that "nobody talks subjunctive." My students quickly realize, however, that at a certain register of speech, when the hotel person addresses the important guest, for example, the subjunctive is just the thing. They want to use it to sound as sophisticated as possible. (For example, "Madame désire-t-elle que je fasse monter ses bagages?") As I tell them, when they first enter the course they may communicate in French at the level of "Me Tarzan, you Jane," and it is hoped that after the course, they can manipulate the equivalent of "I beg your pardon, may I introduce myself; my name is Tarzan, may I ask what's yours?" This kind of learning, in the context of things that are of direct interest to

the students is practically ideal, and I am well situated to compare it with the traditional language courses since I teach one at the same time. Never in my career has the subjunctive gone over so big! I could cite as other examples the usually unpopular causative faire (to make) which is a natural when we get to culinary language (faire cuire, faire sauter, faire bouillir, etc.), or the highly diplomatic conditional and the use of inversion in the interrogative form, both commonly used in formal business communication. So much for grammar. As the French say, it goes as smoothly as a letter down the slot.

B. Our basic textbook is a solid little text published by Hachette: Dany and Laloy's Le Français de l'Hôtellerie et du Tourisme. Its organization is patterned after that of French hotel-school manuals; it takes us through different services of the hotel in turn: reception, rooms, billing, switchboard, room service, restaurant, etc., and it ends with a small section on business-letter writing. Each lesson includes appropriate dialogues and, depending on the general ability and fluency of the class, I ask that the dialogues be either memorized and recited or used as a base for improvisation, variation and role-playing. As I said before, the course meets five hours per week, which has made it difficult to schedule since most hotel students have a heavy course load and also hold jobs or conduct projects for the school. I tried to deal with this time-problem by having two class-meetings back to back: two hours of French! Something that started as makeshift turned out to be a great boon for the course. What immersion! The first couple of weeks each term the students come out somewhat dazed, but after that, these sessions

almost always turn out to be our best. Part of this long period is structured, part of it is totally free. I encourage the students to report on something, to recount some experiences, to ask questions, to inform each other on some aspect of the hotel industry. We always run out of time.

C. Beyond this, I present a lot of ancillary material which I collect every time I go to France: menus, bills, advertisements, hotel information, timetables, touristic brochures. These I generally distribute in advance so that the students can prepare appropriate conversations. By the way, this also provides an excellent review of time, numbers and directions. I have also taken special sets of slides for the class. The first set, which are of French landscapes, follow a rather dry lesson on geography. Another set illustrates the different categories of hotel and restaurant and finally a third set is on food, wine and shopping. I like to top this set off with a cheese appreciation lesson--yes, they learn, there is a difference between Velveeta and aged goat cheese!

Their growing facility in the language makes it possible for them as for me to refer to two fine professional publications: NEO and L'Hotellerie[1], which are rich sources of up-to-date information and of relevant vocabulary. I hope also, now that the school has acquired the necessary equipment, to do more with French video-tapes. So far I have some clips from French television that I show. The students especially like the fast-paced advertisements. It's a good test of oral comprehension and a fascinating study in French facial expressions and body language.

[1]NEO, Restauration. Hotellerie. Collectivites. 91, Faubourg Saint-Honore, 75008 Paris
L'Hotellerie (L'hebdo des C.H.R.) 79, Avenue des Champs, Elysees, 75381 Paris Cedex 08.

D. As for other types of activity, we are fortunate that the Cornell School of Hotel Administration runs a hotel right on campus, which serves as a management laboratory. When possible, I conduct the class on site. For example, the lesson on hotel accommodation is conducted in one of the guest rooms. One of the students plays receptionist, the others are hard-to-please customers asking pointed questions about everything in the room, about the room, about the hotel facilities and services. It works very well. Our class is scheduled at a time when the hotel main dining-room is full, but the banquet department will bring the dining-room to us -- that is, a fully set table, when we do the first lesson on the restaurant. At the end of the semester, then, we invade the kitchens and cook French dishes: as always, the students are not allowed to speak English and the vocabulary they acquire in a couple of hours of sauce-making, they retain very well.

This semester, we are organizing a visit to the brand-new Novotel New York -- part of a French chain -- at the invitation of the management. Short of crossing the Atlantic, the students could have no better experience of the French hotel industry.

Whenever possible I like to include guest speakers, like the student from a previous semester who then spent the summer working in a gourmet restaurant and foie gras factory in Périgord, or the one who worked in Paris for a SNCF hotel. This stimulates great interest and dramatizes the possibility of their actually having the same kind of experience.

I have discovered that although it is practically impossible to obtain a regular long-term French work permit, the Council on International

Educational Exchange (205 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017) will furnish students with a three-month work permit with which to seek a job in France. One of my students has written a number of hotels to obtain a summer job; if he succeeds, I hope to establish permanent lines of communication with a few hotels which would be willing to offer summer jobs. Another outlet, of course, is L'Institut de Management Hôtelier International, a joint program between the Cornell School of Hotel Administration and ESSEC (Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Economiques et Commerciales) at Cergy/Pontoise, near Paris, which gives students the opportunity to study in France. An exchange program is also being established with ESSEC which will permit our students to trade summer internships with French students.

E. Each lesson of our textbook includes a section which I consider very important, entitled "Savoir-Faire" ("know how"), an essential notion in the industry. "Savoir-faire" is only a step away from "savoir-vivre," the French way of doing things. I emphasize immediately that it is not necessarily a <u>better</u> way but a <u>different</u> way. It is sometimes difficult to convince my students that Europeans may place importance on little things that are meaningless to Americans. The goal is not to teach etiquette but to make students more aware of what are vaguely known as "cultural differences" in order to improve their ability at international communication. This can be delicate and I find that the tongue-in-cheek approach works best to get across certain quirks of the French, some of which I describe hyperbolically as "exquisite continental courtesy."

F. Part of the final exam gives the students a chance to try their French on a different person. Fifty percent of the exam grade (10% of the total course grade) is assigned by a disinterested party: the colleague who started the course with me, but no longer teaches it, spends twenty to thirty minutes with each student in an interview situation. She may ask them about their plans, their studies or their background, or invite them to play a role, and she rates their oral proficiency, loosely following the guidelines established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.[1] The students appropriately view this as a rite of passage.

III.

The Hotel School has asked me to evaluate the course as it now exists and to make a proposal for another semester course in French. In view of the quality and the motivation of the students I have taught so far, I have suggested that "French for Hotellies" be offered at a more advanced intermediate level, which would allow us to meet the students' demand for more composition and reading of pertinent texts. The other part of the proposal is to have a general business language course, at a lower level, which would also be geared to students from Cornell's Samuel Johnson Graduate School of Management. We have found what looks like an excellent text for the purpose: French for Business and Finance by Georges Perla, published by D. C. Heath. At this very moment, the Spanish Department is also planning courses similar to the courses in French. These courses will be instituted in the Fall of 1986.

[1]"ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines. A design for measuring and communicating foreign language proficiency."

The experiences of teaching "French for Hotellies" has been an extremely rewarding one, and for me, the question is no longer, "How Can we justify teaching applied languages at the university?" but rather, "How can we weave into our traditional language courses some of the strands that make applied language courses work so well?"